

*Transcendence: Post-Catholic Healing*

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Master of Fine Arts

Photography and Related Media

SUNY New Paltz

December 2022

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We, the thesis committee for the above candidate for the Master of Fine Arts degree, hereby recommend acceptance of this thesis.

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*Transcendence* is an exploration of faith and Catholicism, and the traumatic impact of institutional sex abuse. This body of work consists of a handmade book, thirteen Instax photos, three collages, and an ambient sound piece. It is the culmination of my time spent in the Masters program at SUNY New Paltz and was exhibited at the December 2022 MFA/BFA show at the Samuel Dorsky Museum. In *Transcendence* I dissect the wound the priest of my parish inflicted on me, uncovering an inextricable connection between pain and pleasure. Gifts used for grooming an altar boy turn into subversive weapons in a series of instant film photos. Images used to promote the archbishop and the church are cut and reassembled to visualize the living hell I have seen and felt. Representations of faith are cut and reassembled to visualize the living hell I have seen and felt.

To effectively communicate and properly fill this work with meaning, I had to reestablish within myself a new understanding of faith. I had abandoned faith in every respect; in god, myself, or others. My parish priest had sexually abused me. How could faith be restored when the person I counted on the most to guide me closer to god betrayed me? The solution I found was to *decatholicize* myself, to unlearn years of doctrine that had taught me to be facile and meek for the sake of the institution's ease of oppression. Necessarily I also had to relearn some level of Catholicism in order to understand what specific doctrine needed to be addressed. As I immersed myself in Catholic culture, I found a religion

that encourages reliance and dependence on a central individual or group, all of whom are male, and discourages any questioning or independence. This central structure is deeply political and historically corrupt on almost every level, from local priest to the pope.

The Church routinely withholds information or resources in the interest of delaying or preventing justice, to the detriment of society, or of protecting the Church in the wake of scandal. Take for instance the groundbreaking 2002 *Boston Globe* article that uncovered decades of restructuring to obfuscate sex abuse (Carroll et al.) The exposé uncovered that the diocese of Massachusetts was moving a priest from church to church as a method of hiding sex abuse. The article focused on one priest who, over the course of a thirty year career, would sexually abuse over 130 boys before being finally defrocked in 1998. This formed the basis for the film *Spotlight* (2015), which would drag the topic of clergy abuse back into view after a decade's worth of burying by the Church. More recently in New York, Archbishop Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan has been accused of moving church funds to hidden accounts in order to make those funds inaccessible to survivors of abuse (Stern). This is a slap in the face of survivors, considering many of them were attempting to claim funds through Dolan's own Independent Reconciliation and Compensation Program, which alleges to “heal and bring closure by providing compensation to victim-survivors of abuse” (“IRCP”). Dolan also stands accused of the

similar restructuring tactics of moving priests from church to church that was shown in *Spotlight* (McKiernan). Notably, before his assignment at my former church, my abuser Peter Kihm was at another church in Poughkeepsie; prior to that he was in Fishkill. In 2013, he was reassigned to Rhinebeck, and shortly thereafter news broke that he had sexually abused a boy at one of his earlier posts (*Suspended Dutchess Priest*).

During our shared time at Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Kihm became a close family friend. My mother taught fifth grade in the attached school and he bonded with her over a mutual interest in renaissance art. By befriending my mother, Kihm was allowed into our family circle as he was a figure of trust and authority in our community. There were several other families he was close with who had known him for longer than we had, so nothing seemed unusual. Kihm kept a revolving clique of families and children around him; these were families with devout parents and young children who were altar servers. He was funny and could be extremely generous, which made time with him prized among those he chose to grace with his presence. It was not uncommon for him to take groups of altar servers for meals at a nearby diner or to bring little gifts for us. He was especially keen to take children with absent parents under his wing; for instance, there was teenage sacristan without a father who served as a role model for the younger altar servers. When he learned to drive, Kihm purchased him a

car.

Kihm, my family, and some others had shared vacations during several summers through my adolescence and teenage years. Our first vacations together were to a beach house he would rent on the Jersey Shore. It was on one such trip while sunbathing with me and the sacristan that he exposed his genitals to me. We were sitting in lawn chairs on the rooftop deck of the house when he shifted his leg to reveal his testicles through the leg of the shorts he was wearing. I looked away but he joked about needing to “itch his gonads” and called attention to himself. After this he became more attached to me and my family; he would drop by our house for surprise visits, he came to holidays and family events, and he would bring me occasional gifts. When I was fifteen years old I took my first photography class in high school. I did not have a camera and Kihm offered his 35mm SLR with lenses, a bag, and accessories. Tucked between instruction manuals and warranty cards was an envelope with two photographs of himself. They were full body nude photos of him on the beach, one in which he is standing next to the water and the other in which he is splayed out on a beach chair. I showed my mother and, unsure what to do, we kept it a secret. Gifts continued; he gave me knee high riding boots, leather pants, a replica medieval sword, religious statues, and what he claimed was a “German World War II military dress jacket.” Through high school, I was able to put distance between us until I

graduated and stopped attending mass completely.

*On This Rock I Shall Build My Church* is a handmade book of photographs and prose about my experience with childhood clergy abuse. The book explicitly describes incidences of abuse, how Kihm groomed me over a decade, and the resulting emotional fallout. The book is bound with a Lenten purple embroidery floss using the half-kettle stitch method; the spine is left exposed and is gilded with gold leaf flake. In place of a traditional cover, I hollowed out a vintage hard cover photography book about the Vatican and Pope Pius to house the 6x9 book (*figures 1,2*). The book is printed on Moab Entrada Rag Bright, a double sided 180 GSM paper that folds well, and utilizes single sheet signatures. This allows the book to lay flat inside of the hollowed shell. It was placed on a three foot podium near the wall where *Stations I-XII*, a series of framed Polaroids, was hung (*figure 3*) as part of my Dorsky Museum installation.=

Research for the project began by visiting the site where the abuse began, my home Catholic church Our Lady of Mt. Carmel in Poughkeepsie, NY. Initial explorations consisted of a meditation and slow, observational walk around the neighborhood of the church (regarded as the “Little Italy” area). During my childhood, I spent a substantial amount of time there; since my mother was a teacher at the school attached to the church, I frequently accompanied her to her classroom. With the financial crisis in 2008

the Archdiocese, the governing body of the church, initiated a wave of school closures and layoffs that my mother was swept up in. Despite her leaving the school, we remained regular members at the church.

The goal of my walks around the church was largely to remember things I had repressed and to photograph while feeling the emotions that sprang forth. This was a period of evocation, where only by revisiting the church and walking around it could I begin the process of healing (and thus creation). Through making a conscious effort to remember things I had repressed, I was able to communicate these sensations through the images. My vision was further clarified when I eventually entered the church. The enormous, heavy wooden doors in the front entrance were a barrier of anxiety. Crossing the threshold was a considerable challenge; I had not returned to this church for close to a decade at this point. The inside was close to how I had left it, except the parish was half the size that it once was. Speaking with individuals in the church, I learned that the parish had combined with two other Poughkeepsie parishes, and that many of the older Italian parishioners had passed away. Repeatedly I visited the church to make photographs, record ambient sound, meditate, and remember. Eventually attending a mass on several occasions to observe and listen to both the parishioners and the priest was an important step in breaking what remaining fear I had in approaching this topic. I gave close attention

to the artwork within the church: statues, paintings, architecture, and particularly the enormous crucifixion scene painted above the altar (Figure 1).

The mural begins around chest level on the wall behind the tabernacle and continues up to the arched ceiling. It depicts Christ's crucifixion at Golgotha; in the center, Christ is the highest figure on his cross. From this position, he can watch over the flock of parishioners below. This work was created from 2009-2010 by Poughkeepsie painter Keith Gunderson. It was commissioned by the parish and Fr. Peter Kihm for OLMC's centennial in 2010 (Gunderson). As is tradition in catholic altar paintings, Kihm was included in the painting as a praying man in white clerical robes. He would be immortalized there even after his assignment was changed to Rhinebeck, and even after he left the Catholic church due to credible allegations of abuse. The painting features prominently in one of my book's central photos, which I use to draw a comparison between his youthful figure in the painting and the nude photographs.

The evolution of the photographs I took around the church can be tracked by the tools used for making them. Initial explorations of the space and topic were made with my favorite, most approachable tools for trying new things – medium format plastic cameras and 35mm rangefinders. These allowed me to stay mobile and make images intuitively, which at this stage was key to keep

moving forward. During this stage, I wandered the streets around OLMC looking for metaphorical evidence of divinity and filth. I encountered trinities, crosses, and beautiful beams of light, but also bags of garbage left in strange locations, bits of a wig tied to a fence, and random pieces of clothing that would inexplicably be left under trees. Later, I moved to more precise medium format cameras with the intention of making more formal images. A twin lens reflex allowed me to stay mobile, but I appreciated the weight of the Mamiya RZ67 as it forced slower movement and thus more observation.

As time progressed, meditation became an integral part of this practice – upon my arrival for a walk, I would meditate for at least twenty minutes or until I felt stirred by God to begin. Transcendental meditation and the Quaker method of Silent Worship informed my meditation practice. Both involve sitting silently still without an intention or preconceived notion of how the session *should* go. Instead, the mind or God guides the meditator to where they might need to be.

*Stations I-XIII* consists of thirteen instant film black and white self-portraits in which I pose with a series of objects that were gifted to me during the period of abuse. The objects include a replica medieval sword, a framed prayer (the glass broken), military surplus leather riding boots, leather pants, a statue of Saint Anthony, and the two nude photographs of my abuser (the ones I mentioned earlier that he covertly gave me.) For the exhibition at the Dorsky, the Fujifilm Instax Mini photos were all

mounted in 11x14 extra thick eight ply mats and framed in gray aluminum frames. All thirteen images were hung level with one another in a straight line across the wall, side to side with the frames touching (*figure 3*).

In each image, I take a different pose with the items suggesting a narrative in which I receive the gifts, carry them, die, am reborn, and transcend. The series is meant to evoke the Catholic Stations of the Cross, traditionally fourteen pieces of art (a painting or sculpture) placed on the perimeter of a church that depict Christ's final hours. The parishioner is meant to visit each station and pray; this tradition is particularly relevant during Lent, the forty-day period of fasting and reflection leading up to Easter. Each Friday a special service commences in which the priest leads parishioners to each station to guide them in prayer and meditation, until Good Friday – the day Jesus was crucified and died on the cross.

I decided to use Fujifilm Instax Mini as I was interested in the images as objects. Instant film has been an obsession of mine since roughly 2015, when I began a project of daily documentation which lasted for several years and yielded over a thousand images. I documented people I met, early experiments with my gender, interesting light, but also deeply traumatic events. When a neighbor committed suicide in my apartment complex and I was there to witness it, I documented how I felt with

Instax Mini. As a result, it felt natural to approach photographing my sexual trauma with this format I knew intimately.

An additional consideration was the unique image quality that instant film provides versus any other format. Instant film images have a natural low-fidelity beauty that cannot be achieved with other film or with digital cameras. In making this work, I found that my experiments with high-resolution digital photographs were not able to achieve the impact that the small instant film photos had.

Instax film is typically marketed using happy scenarios like parties, and the cameras are cast in pastel colors. These endearing cultural associations are one potential layer in the viewer's reception. The lighthearted, toylike connection is undeniable. Plastic and joy have been marketing tactics for instant film companies since the 1990's and early 2000's; at this time, marketing for Polaroid's 600 and OneStep cameras began to include crossovers with Barbie, Hello Kitty, and the Spice Girls. Polaroid also introduced the iZone, which could be viewed as the cultural predecessor to Fuji's diminutive camera. Released in the US in 1999, it was a semi-pocketable funky shaped camera that came in fun colors and produced small two inch images that were pulled out of the camera by a plastic strip. The target audience for this camera was younger gen-x and millennial girls. The iZone fit the niche for a fun but simple camera for children to use; the aperture was limited to three options, the flash fired on

every shot, and it was next to impossible to mess up loading the Polaroid Pocket Film (*The Option-al Landist*). These factors led to the camera finding its way into my curious hands as a seven-year-old as my true first camera. Given to me as a gift by my parents, I shot countless packs of the surprisingly expensive film documenting my family, friends, and pets.

A formative influence for my thesis work with Polaroid was Sylvia Wolf's book *Polaroids: Mapplethorpe*, a volume that collected Robert Mapplethorpe's Polaroids from the first ten years of his career. During this time, Mapplethorpe worked extensively with a land camera and peel apart film, later transitioning to a Graflok field camera with a Polaroid back. The images are intimate and edgy, they are simultaneously beautifully composed and reference the formal canon of photography while breaking conventions in their subject matter. Mapplethorpe's work is also about gay leather culture/kink, featuring muscular men chained and leashed to each other in different situations. Given that I was gifted the trappings of leather kink by my abuser, I was drawn to these at times challenging images. Mapplethorpe's posing was evocative of art history and Catholicism; the figures in his images stand contrapposto and naked, or are bound and stretched like Christ on a cross (Wolf 178, 182). In two images, Mapplethorpe poses with a crucifix – standing with his penis hanging over it, and squatting onto it on a stool as if to rub his genitals on it. Many of the photos in the collection are self portraits of

Mapplethorpe where he holds his penis or masturbates, sometimes in heavy bondage or some type of movement prohibiting device. Often the bulb release is present in the photograph as well, denoting him as the photographer.

The erotic nature of many of Mapplethorpe's Polaroids plays up another innate connection to Polaroids – homemade pornography. The ability to photograph and have a print without the need for a professional lab meant that photos could be made without a technician to judge their content. The sexual revolution of the 1960's led to people sometimes making intimate images with their lovers and their inexpensive Polaroids (Bonanos). Prior to contemporary sexting, exchanging nude instant film photos was common; in one thread about the iZone, a Redditor mentioned how his partner would mail him iZone nudes (*Anyone Remember the i-Zone?*). More recently, content creators and sex workers have taken to making nude Polaroid self-portraits and selling them online. Of course, for every consensual use of the medium, there has likely been another that is non-consensual. The same private nature of instant film that suits sexual conduct also provides anonymity to nefarious individuals, like pedophiles.

Additionally, Polaroid has historically been used by police to document domestic abuse. In *Living with the Enemy*, Donna Ferrato's book documenting the women affected by domestic violence, the first

spread contains a photo of a set of Polaroids taken by police in an ER. They are evidence of a woman's wounds after being beaten. Bruises cover her entire body, and her face is swollen. The Polaroids lay on a tiled hospital floor next to a printed article from the hospital that explains what constitutes domestic assault (1991).

Viewing *Stations* is meant to evoke a sense of discomfort in the viewer. The viewing experience requires one to get close to see the image; this is an effect of the small scale of the photos, set in gray frames with extra wide thick 8-ply mats. To view the diminutive Instax images one must be within arm's length, creating intimacy and a private viewing experience. The images feel as though they should be hidden, not meant for public consumption, or that they were made for a lover. Indeed, the root idea for this project was to determine what my abuser expected when he gave me leather pants and boots, and to take his objectifying vision of me and subvert it into something of my own.

Photographing myself was an exercise in self-acceptance of my body, a body which I have felt shame about since the abuse. Where the original vision of the priest was non-consensual and objectified me, my vision affirms my identity as defiant. These are photographs he would have wanted of me when I was fifteen. How would he feel now as I challenge him by creating such images as an adult fully understanding the implications of what he did? Moreover, by taking this intimate trauma and putting it

on a wall for all to see, I expose it to what I expect would be a humiliating degree for my abuser. The images ask, “is this what you wanted?” and force the viewer to see the consequences of the answer.

In the first photograph of the series, *Station I*, I stand starkly nude in the middle of the frame against a white background and I am carrying the pants, boots, prayer, and statue as a pile in my arms (*figure 4*). This is the receipt of the items, the unknowing acceptance of affection, and the sentencing to crucifixion. Looking directly into the camera, I challenge the gaze of the viewer - or of my abuser. In the next image, I am wearing the pants and they are unbuttoned – in a gesture similar to pulling my penis out, I hold the shutter release in the zipper and take the photo. My torso fills the frame down to my thighs, and the background is barely visible as I was physically closer to the camera. Following this image, I stand again in the middle of the frame, slightly twisted and carrying the sword across my shoulders, and I am wearing the pants and boots. My gaze is cast downward, and my face is partially obscured by my hair. These images establish the narrative; where Christ is condemned to death, I instead receive gifts that would come to symbolize a priest's uncouthness and destruction of innocence. Christ is beaten and burdened with his cross, while I am exposed.

*Station IV* depicts me on the ground surrounded by the items, struggling to pull the bulky leather pants over my nude legs. Next, I am standing, clothed in the boots and pants. I stand with my spine

curved and hold the sword out in front of me, pointed towards my stomach. In *Station VI* I am nude again, and present Kihm's nude beach photos to the camera. My head is out of frame so only my torso and thighs are visible. In the next three photos, I wear the pants and lay on the ground and present myself with my legs spread, bow down in worship nude, and hold the statue of St. Anthony with the sword against its throat (*figure 5, 6*).

*Stations X – XIII* are representative of rebirth and redemption. In *Station X*, I am splayed out on the ground with the sword, pants and other items. Next, I lay on my side and sit halfway up, giving my body a twist. My legs are stacked and my hand lays on my thigh. I kneel forward and present the items up, holding the sword with both hands across my nude lap. Finally, I stand and hold my arms wide out. This represents transcendence from the trauma of abuse that has caused me shame around my own body (*figure 7*).

*Abandon All Hope* is a series of three mounted collages hung as a triptych on the wall opposite to viewing *Stations* (*figure 8*). The pieces are sandwiched between two quarter inch thick sheets of plexiglass that are bolted together using gilded nuts, bolts, and washers. Each collage is mounted onto a dark 11x14 inch inkjet print that has been covered in footprints and grime. The clear sheets of plexiglass evoke a specimen slide with a bacterium or virus prepared for study. The pieces were hung

twelve inches apart. The Arakawa hooks attached to the top two bolts of each piece and were wedged into place with a nut on either side to prevent slipping; the bolts had enough excess length to provide a stand off from the wall (*figures 9,10*).

The dark background prints were cut down from an image of a saint, which collected dust, wrinkles, and tears over the course of a year to explore the surface quality. The 30x40 inch print had been taped to my studio floor for months as a study on time and wear. The same image can be found in the book *On This Rock I Shall Build My Church*, which gives the viewer the context for the background image. The objects in the photograph – the statue and prayer – were the ones given to me by Kihm as gifts, specifically, for my confirmation. Alongside them is a rosary and eucharistic host, which represent my former faith.

The collaging process for *Abandon All Hope* began with a collection of issues of *Catholic New Yorker*, a periodical that was published by the New York Archdiocese from 1987 until 2022. The imagery of the contemporary Catholic church functions to promote values and ideals that the institution wishes to maintain. My goal was to take the photographs and images used to promote the church as a holy power structure and juxtapose them with what one would find in the pits of hell. Initially I was subtle, using only photographs found within the newspaper. However, I found a greater impact by also

using the faces of priests that have been credibly accused of sex abuse in the state of New York. These portraits were taken from bishopaccountability.org, an online archive of all news related to Catholic sex abuse. I combined the priests with different real-life horrors taken from war books and dark recesses of the internet: atomic mushroom clouds, bloated or decayed corpses, suicide victims whose heads are opened up like flowers, rivers of blood, fields of dead bodies, and men being eaten by dogs. These images came from forums or shock websites that collect gore and other violent content.

The collages went through several iterations before I found a format that suited them. The initial compositions were eight-by-ten sheets that used strictly photos from *Catholic New Yorker*. They were packed, and because of that, slightly difficult to read. I became interested in pinning the clergy in the photos down, which shifted the material to cork instead of a paper backing. The cork was too distracting, so I began to use 20x30 inch black foam-core sheets. Finally, I was able to distill the collages down by thinning out the imagery and moving the composition to 7x11 inch sheets.

In the first, a nude man reclines across the middle – his face and genitals have been physically burned off the print (*figure 11*). The words “erected, situate, lying and being” have been pasted beneath the man's buttocks. Behind him, a bloated corpse drapes an arm behind his head and across his shoulders as if they were embraced. The belly on the corpse is distended to the point of rupture in the

middle, and a split follows the length of the other arm. A black bar censors the corpse's face and genitalia. A lake of blood fills the foreground and reflects buildings and people while trash floats by like a small boat. Fully clothed bodies lying on top of one another creep into the blood bath and massive laceration acts as portal or source. Looming behind the central figures, the bloated face of another corpse peeks a single discolored eye towards the viewer, returning the gaze. Dark church architecture hangs down from the top acting as a ceiling, with members of the clergy conspicuously cut out leaving human shaped voids instead. A single priest stands next to the scene, but he is missing his head and an arm holding a cross grows from his chest.

In the next collage, a large arm reaches up from the bottom of the page and grips the bust of a priest in its palm (*figure 12*). The hand squeezes and wrings the priest and liquid pours down the arm while explosions burst out of his head. Among the ring shaped explosions the crooked head and decayed face of a hanged man appears between layers of smoke. A cluster of bodies curves along the halo of smoke behind the priest's head. Growing from the top of the ring, a man who has committed suicide by shotgun sits like another cloud. His head has been blown wide open on his shoulders and lays spread like a flower; his shotgun sits across his chest, still pointing up. In the top left, facing out from the explosions, a macerated skull looks outward. The text "life is very good" is in the top right corner, and

in the lower left corner is a caption from CNY about a Catholic suicide prevention program headed by Cardinal Dolan.

In the final piece of the triptych, a gas-masked soldier stands tall among flames and smoke that jut forth from burning police vehicles (figure 13). The soldier holds a rifle with a priest skewered on the end of the bayonet while he tramples a group of clergy underfoot. The bayonet slices across the chest of a large upside-down man who is completely nude, except for his head and shoulders, which wear a priest's face and collar; the face is giving a candid toothy smile as if for a portrait. A booted foot presses one of the man's legs down, splaying them open and allowing a dog to bite away at his genitals. More explosions erupt behind him and consume another group of clergy clad in white liturgical robes. A fleshy eye floats in the smoke above them, its iris made of a bishop who watches the mayhem below.

My firsthand experience with suicide, mentioned earlier, was a force in choice of topic; the suicide I had witnessed was of a man who had killed himself with a handgun. In 2016, I was working on my car when I heard a gunshot and screaming come from the neighboring parking lot. It was a quiet neighborhood, so I ran to see what happened. I found a woman sobbing in the street who did her best to explain that she had been in an argument with her boyfriend, and that when she left their apartment, he got into his car and shot himself. Sure enough, I went to his car (the same model as mine) and found

him still alive, covered in blood that poured from his mouth, nose, and a head wound I couldn't see. He murmured a little as everything from his head pooled in his lap and onto the floorboards of the car. The blood reflected the white light from accent lights placed in the footwells. I stood there for some time with another woman and we did our best to help him while waiting for an ambulance. Eventually when one came, I realized a ring of people had formed around the parking lot. The man's partner was still sitting in the middle of the street sobbing but people had their phones out, pointed at the car. I could hear them talk about how the EMTs were wasting their time, and that this man was already dead.

The attraction of the crowd made me consider the dramatic display of public death; what draws us to crane our necks to see the blood as we pass by? Could photos of bloodied corpses play off this innate, often problematic, curiosity people have about seeing death before the cleanup? I was interested in using such intense imagery because of the spectacle that blood draws; the general public has a lust for blood and violent images that is evidenced by the presence of the content itself. People readily consume media that stylizes violence and gore with no concept of the reality behind those images; the screen provides a barrier between the viewer and the person suffering. Websites and forums are dedicated to collecting photos and videos of real gore with no regard for the people in the images. Reddit is the rabbit hole where many begin; the forum is comprised of subreddits that range from heavy

moderation to absolute free for all. Lawless subreddits are the first to be banned, which in turn leads to heavy content moderation or secrecy to protect those communities from deletion. The other introduction many receive is from 4chan's /b/ message board, a forum where users share every random version of violent and sexual content. In these spaces humanity loses itself and the fragility of our bodies is made forefront. Commenters on the moderated boards like Reddit's former r/Watchpeople die would stick to community guidelines to avoid being banned. On the other hand, places like 4chan are filled with total vitriol. Videos are hosted on sites like deadhouse.com, or former liveleak, and bestgore, where playlists compile Isis executions and cartel murders. A consistently popular category on these sites is always suicides; there are thousands of videos of people jumping from buildings, livestreamed suicide by firearm, dashcam videos of people speeding into trees, leaked police evidence, etc. Similar communities exist for self harm and suicide, eating disorder “inspiration,” and hard drug use.

Infamously, sanctioned suicide.com has thousands of users who encourage each other to end their lives.

The website has guides that list what specific materials to gather to create a suicide kit, such as a chemical available from retailers like Amazon (Twohey and Dance). The site was made public

knowledge when several media outlets ran articles about it. *Catholic New Yorker* referred to it as a

“macabre site” and “as demonic an action” as they've had ever seen (“Stop Promoting Searches of

Macabre Site”).

To be plagued by suicidal ideation is hell in itself. By using actual photos of suicide, I impress upon the viewer the gravity of one's physical remains after ending their own life. At the same time, I condemn the priests who sexually abused children to a hell that doctrine says is reserved for the unbaptised, the adulterous, and for the victims of suicide.

Another section of my thesis installation, *Kyrie*, is an ambient audio piece recorded to cassette tape and played from a tape deck, filling the exhibition area with sounds (*figure 14*). The piece is composed of various layers of priests chanting Kyrie Eleison, that have been blended together and individually manipulated by reversing them, using feedback, reverb, and other techniques. The piece begins with the sound of footsteps that fade in, leading up to the welcoming boom of a church organ. Priests sing harmoniously but it quickly becomes a cacophony as dozens more join their choir. The men's voices and accompanying organists compete for prominence as they swell and shrink back in volume. The priests quiet down and another group starts singing the Kyrie in reverse. As the group finishes, their voices devolve into slowed, distorted yowls. Ambient church sounds begin; occasionally in the background, there are footsteps and the shutter of a camera. After some time, the ambient sound and chanting fade away. Footsteps approach and the track loops again.

Almost all the ambient sound was recorded while photographing Our Lady of Mt. Carmel and its surrounding neighborhood. While walking and photographing, I recorded my footsteps across multiple seasons. I also recorded sound inside the church itself. While photographing, I would set my recorder in a nearby position to record my movements. The sounds of a train and traffic can be heard faintly in the background.

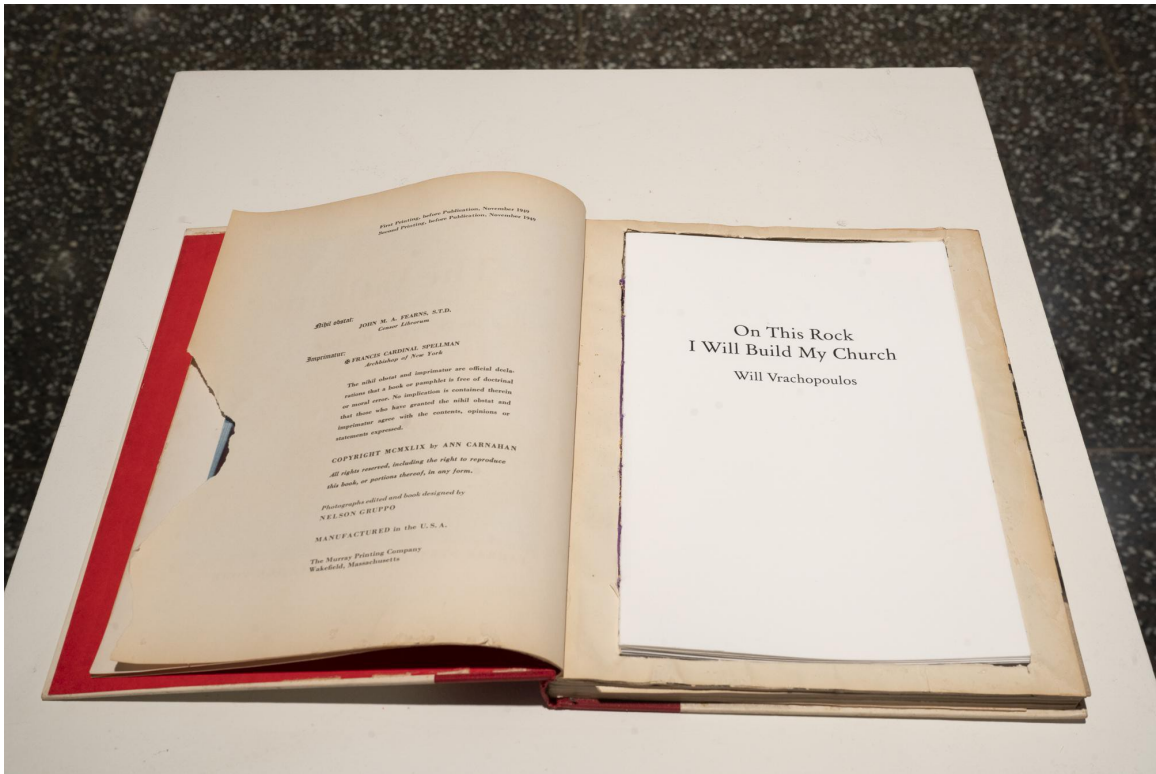
I was interested in noise and sound, and how those can be attributes to reliving a traumatic experience. In this instance, the sounds of where much of the abuse happened were combined with musical symbols of faith. By making the priests sing the Kyrie in reverse, I created an inversion of it that plays off satanic panic hidden messaging hysteria. Conservatives have claimed that artists have hidden satanic messages in their music that can only be revealed by playing the album backwards; what message does *Kyrie Eleison* sung in reverse hold?

The entirety of this work would have been impossible without my regular therapy practice. One cannot make work that deals with such traumatic subjects without an experienced guide. My therapist is an essential aid in understanding myself, unpacking why things happened or exposing questions that were left unasked. With her encouragement, I am able to look deeply inward and create work that simultaneously challenges societal expectations and heals me. Rosy Martin and Jo Spence collaborated

on a therapy project in which they challenge male gaze of their bodies, analyze familial absence, and undo decades of homophobic hate speech. In their essay *Photo-Therapy*, they explain that photo-therapy “engages... the needy child within us all which still needs to be seen and heard.” (403) They propose that photographs are a key factor in forming identities, and since societal expectations often influence photographs, identities are warped by society. Further, in photo-therapy, photographs can be used to “objectify and see a separate part of oneself” that can then be explored and reincorporated into one's “core self.” Photographs provide catharsis, a pure channel to the unconscious, and the ability to recognize “what has been resisted and repressed, then let go and move on.” (409).



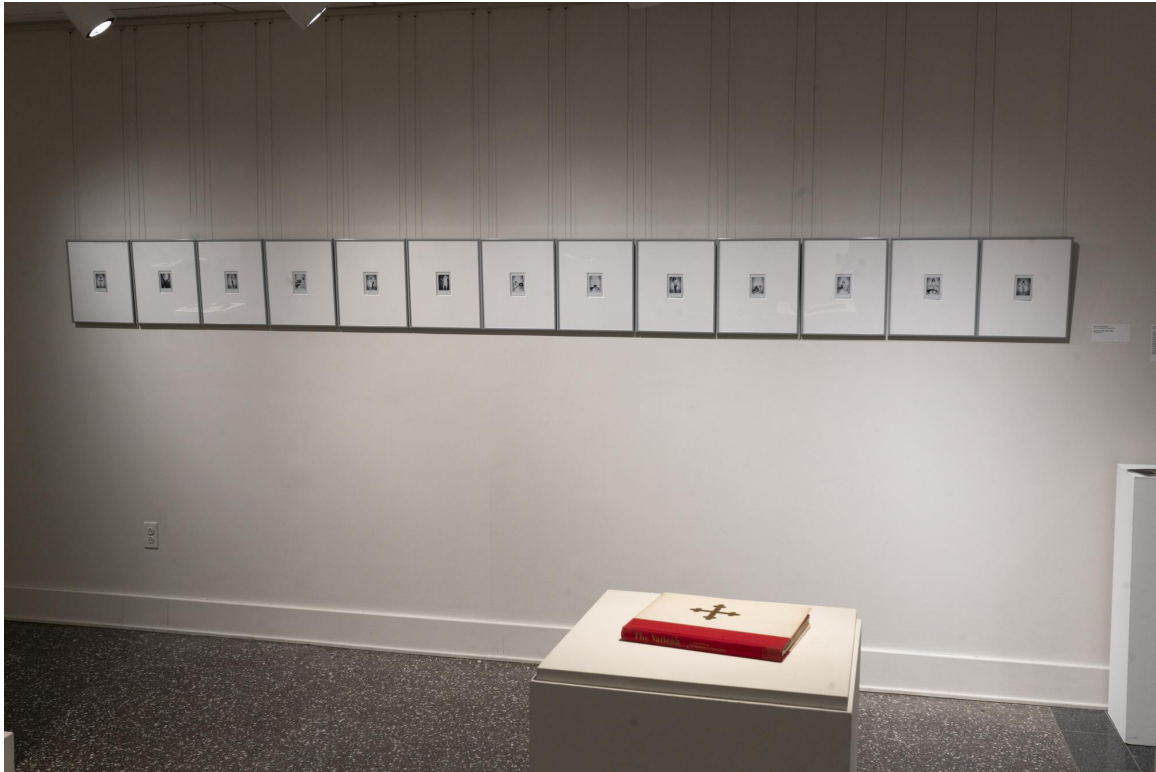




*Figure 1, On This Rock I Will Build My Church Install View*



*Figure 2. Bound with Purple Thread*



*Figure 3, On This Rock I Will Build My Church and Stations I-XIII Install View*



*Figure 4, Stations I, II*



*Figure 5, Stations III, IV, V*



*Figure 6, Stations VI-X*



*Figure 7, Stations XI, XII, XIII*



*Figure 8, Abandon All Hope, Install View*



*Figure 9, Bolt and Hook Hanging Method*



*Figure 10, Bolt Standoff*



*Figure 11, Abandon All Hope I*



*Figure 12, Abandon All Hope II*



*Figure 13, Abandon All Hope III*



*Figure 14, Kyrie*

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